1: Conzemius M-4, 5 (1921) 1932
SA15 Mosquito SA15

Poisoning is nowadays the usual method of disposing of an enemy. The poison is administered in rum or fermented drinks, with the aid of a third person, when the intended victim is intoxicated. This method of killing has been rather common in recent years. As poison the Indian uses some strong native drugs, alligator gall, or even cyanide stolen from the gold mines. The Miskito from Rio Coco are supposed to make frequent use of poison. If the Indian kills his enemy with the aid of a gun, arrow, or knife, he will have to follow him into death, but such does not appear to be the case when poison has been administered.

ADULTERY.—Morality is at a low ebb, particularly among the Miskito, and most of the disputes and crimes that occasionally take place are the results of quarrels about women. The injured husband inflicts a severe beating on his unfaithful wife or attempts to choke or drown her in order to make her tell the name of the other delinquent, from whom a payment (M.: *mairin mana;* T., P.: *yal minit;* U.: *yal makalnak*) is exacted. Such a "woman payment" consists generally of a cow or a gun. Otherwise wife beating is not common. Occasionally a woman has committed suicide for having received a sound beating from her husband on account of her unfaithfulness, and the latter was then compelled to pay up to her relatives. Bell (a: 251) states that he had known men keeping wives for the sole purpose of the revenue derived from their misconduct.

DEBT.—If a debtor refuses to pay up or to return or refund the object or money borrowed, the creditor might go to his plantation and pay himself with provisions without risk of punishment. If such a debt can not be collected in an amiable way, the creditor, instead of wrangling with the debtor, might destroy some property belonging to a third person. Pressure is then brought to bear upon the debtor and he has to make good the damage done.

VARIOUS.—Sometimes an Indian who had been grossly insulted and was unable to collect payment would commit suicide, whereupon the offender had to do the same. This system led to complicated cases, and the following has been recorded by the Moravian missionaries. A Miskito woman, being continually mistreated by her husband, ran away from him. The latter then proceeded to the house of his parents-in-law, where he was told that his wife, unable to endure his barbarous treatment any longer, had hung herself. The man understood what that meant and committed suicide without hesitation. Then the woman, whom every one had believed dead, returned to the village. But now the relations of her husband wanted her to commit suicide also for having caused the latter's death by her flight from home. As the unfortunate woman hesitated, not having the courage to do what was asked of her, her husband's relations seized her and hung her to the nearest tree.

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SA15 Mosquito SA15

These acts of vengeance were not considered as murders but as duly merited punishments, wherewith a crime, supposed or real, had been expiated. Thus one murder was often the first link of a long chain of similar crimes, as the relations of the first victim considered themselves compelled, according to the Indian custom, to put the murderer to death.

Suicide was generally committed by hanging or by discharging a loaded gun in the throat. No one would prevent a person from taking his own life under the above-mentioned circumstances.

There is in general little crime among the Indians and the life and property of foreigners is respected; several cases of piracy, that is, the plundering by the Miskito of vessels wrecked on the coast, have been recorded, however (Bard: 160; Bell, b: 294; Wickham, b: 204).

CHARACTER

The Indian, as a rule, is very frank and outspoken, silent, phlegmatic, honest, and reliable, but also somewhat revengeful and ungrateful and inclined to drunkenness.

Even among their own kindred the Indian will show great reserve upon the first approach, but after a while this changes, and soon they will relate to each other the details of their respective hunts and travels.

Stinginess is considered the worst of all vices, and the foreigner who is very liberal in bestowing small presents among them is soon known far and wide as a "good man" (M.: *wáikna pán;* S.: *al yamni, al yamka*).

All these Indians are somewhat inclined to laziness and are fond of passing whole days in their hammocks. Still one must admire their great patience, skill, and endurance in hunting and fishing. They are able to paddle in the hot sunshine for 10 hours a day, making only a short stop at noon in order to prepare their meal.

Much patience must be observed during the relations with the Indians, and self-control is considered by them as one of the cardinal virtues. If a laborer has been insulted by his employer he will generally keep up with his day's work, or the time he has been contracted for, without showing any perceptible sign of dissatisfaction. At the expiration of his engagement he will ask for his time, without giving any reason, and later apply somewhere else for work. The Indian has little respect for the newcomer who indulges frequently in sudden outbursts of temper.

As a general rule these Indians are not quarrelsome, especially the men. But once a difference has arisen between the women, the most obscene and vulgar language is used without interruption for whole

3: Pijoan D-5 (ca. 1945) 1946
SA15 Mosquito SA15

304 with reference to the head, a custom which had not been practiced by the Miskito. It is no longer performed by the Sumu during the present day.

621 624 There is no trace of any division in clans or exogamic kinship groups. Before the conquest, the Miskito were not ruled by supreme chiefs, but in time of war the elders would chose some young warrior, noted for prowess, to guide the activities of the group. Generally, though, they were not a warlike people. Hereditary chiefs were introduced by the British and the ruler became despotic in activity. His orders would be carried out by quarter masters *(kwatmas)* or by other members of his staff. Foreign traders extended gifts to the Chief (King) for trading privileges and the Indians rendered assistance and taxes. However, the Indians in the interior paid but little attention to this hierarchy. Today there are village chiefs who guide the civic affairs of the community on what appears to be a democratic basis. Decisions are made as a result of council meetings where considerable discussion may take place.

648 The governments of the two republics, Honduras and Nicaragua, have territorial representatives known as comandantes and these are *Ladinos* (see Appendix B). The comandante may have other *Ladinos* on his staff or as is often the case works in close collaboration with the traders. In the upper Coco River the comandante is stationed at San Carlos. He patrols the area, listens to complaints and his decisions are autocratic. He is in military uniform and his status is one of army discipline. The various companies, i. e., fruit enterprises, rubber development agencies, etc., have many *Ladino* foremen who work in close harmony with the comandante. From the Indian point of view considerable friction exists between himself and the government representative. Since the Indians have no recourse with the Central Government, the jurisdiction of their problems rests with the territorial representative. The Indian complains that there is misappropriation of funds and that traders take endless advantage of them. Regardless of right or wrong, conflict exists and as such it is probably due to the lack of peoples' representation in territorial jurisdiction. Government education [871] is at minimum, the various religious missions have generally performed this service to the better satisfaction of the Indians. The In- [554] dians live with great equality, there appears to be no rich or poor among them; they do not strive to accumulate wealth.

674 626 Within the villages themselves government takes place with the elders guided by a chief. A thief is compelled to restore stolen property and an adulterer pays a fine of a gun or a cow. Stealing is rare, except in the more urban areas and adultery is uncovered usually as a result

3: Pijoan D-5 (ca. 1945) 1946
SA15 Mosquito SA15

of quarrel between two women. The fact remains that very little wrong-doing exists among the Miskito since once a wrongdoer is found out he loses the respect of his community and usually moves to another locality. It a debtor refuses to pay or refund an object or money borrowed, the creditor informes the village of this fact and he can go to the plantation of the debtor and pay himself in provisions without risk. Such pressure usually causes the debtor to make goods his debt.

In rare cases today poisoning is used to exterminate an enemy. This is accomplished by the use of poisonous extracts from plants, alligator gall, or cyanide stolen from the mines. If, however, an Indian shoots his enemy, he must likewise follow him to death. In certain cases, if an Indian has been insulted and cannot collect payment, he commits suicide, wherepon the offender must do the same. In most instances the threat in itself brings apology and payment. In general there is little crime among the Miskito.

The Indians show great reserve, are relatively silent, honest and generally reliable. Stinginess is considered the worst vice and foreigners who bestow gifts are known as good men. They are not quarrelsome. Recent contacts with foreigners has increased their shrewdness and they are less shy than they were years ago.

Members of the family address each other according to sex and relation, such as mother, father, daughter, brother, etc. Each has a name given for some peculiarity. Thus, an infant receives no name until some characteristic is noted.

The mentioning of a deceased person's name is taboo and is a direct insult to refer to the person in the presence of relatives. Husband and wife call each other *mayi*, my consort; before a child is born to them he calls her *kika*, girl, while she calls him *wahma*, young man. After a child is born they often call each other *lukpi yapti*, my child's mother, and *lukpi aisa*, my child's father. *Mahma* or *masa* are used to address a son or brother, whereas *kika* or *misis* refer to daughter or sister. Old men and women are called *dama*, grandfather, and *kuka*, grandmother. The common form of salutation is *naksa* and occasionally *nahki sma* (how are you?) The other replies *aiñwa sna* (I am well). When they take leave the expression is *aisabi* (we will speak again).

DWELLINGS

The villages *(tawan)* are located chiefly on the banks of waterways, rivers and lagoons. The reason for this may be twofold. First the waterways form the chief source of transportation by boat and secondly agriculture and wild fruits can be developed and secured near